



ARTISTIC EVALUATION

This evaluation is intended to represent an objective aesthetic judgement. **Specialist advisors and officers should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences wherever possible.**

Artist/Company: The Tron Theatre Company

Venue: The Tron Glasgow

Title of Event: That Face

Type of Event: Play

Date of Visit: 13 October 2009

Overall Rating Good

(Please rate the event overall, taking into account your ratings for each section. Please state the key reasons for your overall ratings – i.e. the particular strengths and weaknesses. If the management of the event affects the overall enjoyment of the event, please comment, but the overall rating should be based on the artistic merit of the event.)

A powerful new voice in writer Polly Stenham who nevertheless needs some time to mature into the work this first play promises. The production worked very hard to beef up an increasingly one-note drama, fleshing out characters and bringing the world of the piece into sharper focus. However, there was life, anger, wit and power in the script to be found. Perhaps something was lost in the translation from England to Scotland, with our slightly different class distinctions.

Name: Chris Dolan **Date** 06 / 07 / 09
Specialist Advisor

This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to evaluate the artistic quality of the production named above. It has been prepared by either a specialist Advisor, or an officer of the Scottish Arts Council, as indicated on the form. The report will be circulated to the organisation which produced the work and to the management of the venue, if the venue is core funded by the Scottish Arts Council.

The report will form evidence for the Artistic Leadership and Public Engagement sections of the Quality Framework and be taken into account in assessing the work of the producing company in relation to future applications for funding to the Scottish Arts Council. It may also be used by the Joint Board to report on the overall performance of its funded organisations.

Evaluators should enter their rating under each section, explaining briefly their reason for the rating with reference to their comments under each section. Ratings should be given in accordance with the following:

Very poor- standard falls well below what is acceptable.

Poor - not well conceived and executed

Satisfactory

Good - well conceived and executed

Very Good – well conceived and executed to a very good standard

Excellent – Inspiring and executed to an exceptionally high standard

1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, with particular reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the following:

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Vision and imagination of work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of ideas • if you have seen other work of this artist(s)/ company before, please comment on any relevant comparisons 	Good	<p><i>That Face</i> was a massive critical hit in London, introducing the then 19 year old Polly Stenham as a new wonderkid among playwrights. Its success, I imagine, was partly down to its shock value, and partly for the real need to find new, young, urgent voices in the theatre. Perhaps especially those who portray middle-class life.</p> <p>However it's easier to shock than to be true. The story of <i>That Face</i> is extreme in every way, and hardly typical of the English middle classes. Stenham has, however, created at least one unforgettable and compelling character in Martha, the mother of the household. It is clearly Stenham's belief – and for all I know, her experience – that parents these days are much worse than their kids; that any moral lacking in teenagers must stem directly from the greed and egocentricity of their parents.</p> <p>Were it not for Kathryn Howden's powerhouse performance and sturdy back-up particularly from James Young as Martha's son Henry, the piece would have been little more than the depiction of a particularly bizarre well-heeled family. That double-act saved the play, a duet of monstrous egos and need.</p>
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does it fit within the artistic vision of the organisation? • If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme. 	Good	<p>Andy Arnold's continued success in making the Tron a genuine centre for new writing and good drama, means he must chase the latest sensation in London. And so he should - I imagine it was something of a coup to secure the play for the Tron. Whatever we may think of it, it is good that we get the chance to see it, and see it done by Scottish talent.</p> <p>The play also gave three young actors a chance to work in front of big audiences in a very professional production.</p>
All	Success of event against stated aims of project and/or performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does it relate to information contained in the programme, the website or other printed material? • How well did it communicate the artistic themes? • How did the event originate eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, from the artist or from commission? <p>Education events – see ¹below for definition</p>	Satisfactory	<p>The Tron production was marketed on the back of the London version's success. Up close we can question that success a little. 'Explosive and gobsmacking' said the Observer, quoted in all the play's marketing. I'm not sure, finally, it was that explosive. No real, general truth was revealed to us. Gobsmacking, yes, but so are lots of (too many?) plays. 'Remarkable and unforgettable' said the Telegraph. Again yes, but more for Howden's and Young's performances and some deft direction.</p>

¹ Education is a bridge between artform excellence and increased access and participation, and it is people centred. Providing opportunities for learning and progressing in an artform or using an artform to address

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Performers/tutors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the expertise of the performers? Where performers are amateur, please reflect this in your comments. • How successfully did the performer(s) communicate with and engage the audience? • In your view, was an artist as a tutor key to the success of the workshop? 	Excellent	<p>Martha is an alcoholic mother who is – to understate it hugely – protective of her son, Henry, and dismissive of her daughter Mia. The meat of the drama lies in this triangle, with the Martha / Henry relationship the central problem.</p> <p>The script gives the actors a limited amount to work with. Martha endlessly manipulates Henry – to the point of near-incest – with the same needy complaints and pleadings. Henry endlessly complies and whines to his sister that only <i>he</i> has helped their mother, and perhaps only he can save her.</p> <p>It is thanks to the actors, rather than the script, that these repetitions find nuances and a little development as the play progresses.</p> <p>Kathryn Howden is convincing from start to finish – and it is a hard role to make convincing. In Martha's wit and flirtiness we can just detect the dying embers of a once creative and spirited woman. As the flirting builds to outright sexuality, stopping just this side of incest, Howden and Young convince us that this relationship perhaps really could exist.</p> <p>James Young flounders a little when not in duet with Howden – the other three characters in the play are little more than ciphers which makes it difficult for him to play off.</p> <p>Something is lost in the translation of the action from London to Glasgow, which creates difficulties for Hollie Gordon as Mia. Neither genuinely minted and posh nor nouveau-riche – tough working-class girl with daddy's money – Mia sounds like a rather ordinary middle-class Glaswegian schoolgirl (though Gordon does look a little too old for the part). Her hi-jinks with private-school-pal Izzy are somehow too pat but unconvincing. Hannah Donaldson does a good turn as precocious spoilt brat, but the school story simply doesn't hang together. Who is the real bully – Mia or Izzy? The script itself can't decide.</p> <p>Henry and Mia's father, Hugh, barely exists. Phil McKee looks lost trying to play such a threadbare character.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the work original? • How was the space used? • How many dancers were there and how were they used? • How long was the piece? 	n/a	
Theatre	Script Please comment on this for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new work • second productions • classics where the original has been substantially 	Good	An extremely professional production that offset problems – flaws in the script, three young and inexperienced performers – to create a satisfying night of theatre.

other, non-artistic, outcomes are equally valid; in either case a high quality strategic approach is required in order to benefit the participants and the organisation. Delivery can be through workshops, post/pre-show discussions, outreach work, etc aimed at any age group.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	changed		
Theatre, Dance	Direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the work well interpreted? • Was it well cast? • Was it well presented? 	Good	<p>Watching the play, you feel that Andy Arnold is fire-fighting with the script rather than spring boarding off it. The dramatic development is a little clumsy and, between the two central characters, quite static until the final scene. But Arnold has found ways of making the play work rather well. First in casting. In creating a sense of tension he had to dig rather deeply for in the words. His use of space is economical, unfussy and effective. The temptation to overstate, play the laden moments up, and let the actors <i>too</i> much off their leads must have been tempting. Arnold's experience was badly needed to counteract Stenham's youthful gung-ho energy.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Use of music <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the music/ sound used enhance the production? • Is it live or recorded? 	n/a	<p>If there was any, I had no memory of it an hour after the curtain came down. Which means, if it was there, it was unobtrusive and effective.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How were the costumes, set and lighting? • How did it work in the venue? • Was it technically proficient? (eg lighting and sound cues, etc). 	Good	<p>The design, lighting, costumes all did their jobs, neither getting in the way of the drama, nor overly highlighting either the sordidness of Martha's living space or the fanciness of Hugh's pad. There is so much angst and volume in the lines alone that understatement elsewhere was exactly what was called for.</p>
All	Quality of Public Engagement <p>Performing Arts/Education -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the production/event targeted at a particular audience? • Was the production /event appropriate for the audience/participants? • Were you/ engaged/inspired? • Did the audience/ participants appear to be engaged/inspired? • What was their response? • Approximately how many people were there? • Did there appear to be a broad mix of people – age, cultural diversity or disabled? • Are BSL/captioned/audio described performances offered as part of the run/tour/? If so how many? • What activities or supporting materials were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups programmes, on line info? • Were these targeted at 	n/a	<p>Full house the night I was there, that was hooked in – just enough.</p> <p>Post-show discussion which, unfortunately, I could not attend, but heard was interesting.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<p>specific age groups?</p> <p>Education/learning events: In addition, please provide comments on the following (if appropriate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was it taught/led eg one to one, group, child centred? • What was the composition of the participant group – age range, gender mix? • Is it strategically linked to the curriculum or national policy areas e.g. Early Years, Community Learning & Development • What learning/skills development took place? • What was the quality of the art produced by the participants? • Did the workshop tutor have a teaching plan for the session and/or project? • How were participants recruited? • Did participants' views and choices help inform the structure and content of the project? <p>Crafts/Visual Arts Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang?</p>		

2. Management of Event

Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and the venue, with reference to the checklist below, including additional comments/observations. Please try to view the venue and the services, and interpretative material as though you had never visited it before eg if you did not know the venue's location, how easy would it be to find your way there, and to find your way around once you had arrived?

Criteria	Comment								
Location and suitability of the venue for the event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route? Are the spaces clean? What were the sight lines like? How big was it? 	<p>The Tron is well known, easy access from trains and buses, reasonable parking nearby.</p> <p>The theatre has excellent sight lines, is always well kept and a perfect size.</p>								
Information/ interpretive material at venue– <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there programmes, posters and displays about the event? Is there information on the venue's website? 	<p>Plenty of information on posters, the Tron's own web site, and the programmes are satisfactory.</p>								
Publicity/ pre-publicity – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What leaflets, posters, websites, did you see the event listed in? What publicity materials are produced? Is it easy to understand? Where can you get the information? Is there Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²? <p>Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event and comment on the company/organisation's website.</p>	<p>The Tron has a good marketing department, and their material is always well written.</p> <p>Acknowledgement made to SAC.</p>								
Ease of booking and payment	<p>No problem.</p>								
Timing of the event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience? Was the length appropriate? 	<p>Yes.</p>								
Signage and signposting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the entrance clearly marked? Is there clear internal directional signage? Is there Braille signage or signage for audio loops? 	<p>Yes. Braille, I do not know for sure, but would be surprised if the Tron hasn't accommodated the sight-impaired.</p>								
Access and provision for disabled people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please insert yes/no in the boxes to reflect what you notice about the venue/event <p>Please add in any additional</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Yes/No</th> <th></th> <th>Yes/No</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>BSL interpretation</td> <td></td> <td>Audio description of performances</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Yes/No		Yes/No	BSL interpretation		Audio description of performances	
	Yes/No		Yes/No						
BSL interpretation		Audio description of performances							

² In press releases, at launches, on all published materials (including leaflets, brochures, programmes, posters, company's website, notices display, exhibition materials, websites and advertising, recordings, publications, video, broadcasts, computer programmes etc.) Where the event is publicised in the programme brochure of another organisation (eg venue, gallery, etc) then SAC acknowledgement should appear against the particular programme entry for this event.

Criteria	Comment			
comments below the table <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many BSL/captioned/audio described performances are there at the venue? 	Captioning		Lift/ramp	
	Accessible toilets		Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English	
Customer service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How was the quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering) If possible, comment on how responsive they were to the needs of disabled customers? 	In my experience, Tron staff pleasant and helpful to all.			

3. Organisation's Comments (optional)

This is the organisation's opportunity to respond to points raised within this assessment. Please do not feel obliged to fill this section in. In the spirit of the Quality Framework, we would ask that any comments are self-evaluating, providing an insight as to why, if there is, a major disagreement of response between the organisation and the evaluation, in a constructive way.

This will not alter the rating given by the assessment, but will allow the organisation the opportunity to give their opinion/feedback. The Scottish Arts Council reserves the right to edit comments if they are deemed to be libellous or defamatory.

As the Scottish Arts Council implements the Quality Framework internally, we intend to publish artistic evaluations on organisations that we support regularly on our website. The final artistic evaluation, including the organisation's response will be published on a quarterly basis on our website.

Please keep your response to max 500 words. If we do not hear from you in 15 days, we will assume that you do not want to respond.